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Hmong refugee resettlement interviews underway at Wat

Thirty years after the end of the Vietnam War and about 10 years after arriving at Wat Tham Krabok in Thailand, as many as 15,000 Hmong refugees may finally be on the way to resettlement in the United States. They would join about 160,000 Hmong already here.

That was one piece of good news PRM Deputy Assistant Secretary Kelly Ryan brought back from her recent trip to Southeast Asia undertaken at the direction of Assistant Secretary Arthur E. Dewey. Following up on a January trip to the region to launch the program, she reported much progress at the Wat (temple) processing site. Infrastructure is in place and screening has begun. The Thai government is providing clinic staff, nurses, and supplies to help with inoculations and other health needs. Refugee interviews began April 23.

DAS Ryan reported overwhelming interest in resettlement among the Hmong. Many of the refugees have family members in the U.S. and believe their children would have better opportunities here. She also said there is little apparent opposition from elements in the U.S. (Many Americans, especially Vietnam veterans, remember the Hmong



Kelly Ryan at microphone, left, meets with refugees

as brave fighters in the once-secret wars in Laos who were forced to flee to Thailand after the U.S. pullout.)

DAS Ryan noted with pride how quickly the Hmong resettlement program has been set up. "This is a great example of U.S. leadership in addressing a protracted refugee situation," she said.

More than Refugees:

Other Populations Served by the Office of Refugee Resettlement

In the Refugee Act of 1980, Congress established the Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) within the Department of Health and Human Services to provide cash, medical assistance and social services to refugees resettled in the United States.

Since ORR was established, the US has resettled more than two million refugees from Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Americas, the Middle East, Asia, Southeast Asia, and Africa.

The Presidential Determination authorizes up to 70,000 refugees to be admitted to the US in FY 2004. Currently, ORR is working with the Department of State to prepare for the arrival of some 13,000 Somali Bantu, 7,000 Liberian refugees from Cote d'Ivoire, 8,000 to 10,000 Hmong refugees from Thailand, and 3,000 to 5,000 Meshketian Turks from Russia. Other refugee groups identified by the Department of State will likely soon follow.

As the name of the office suggests, refugee resettlement is the principle focus of ORR. However, over the last two decades, ORR's expertise in assisting refugees has been used to aid a number of other special groups. These groups include asylees, Cuban and Haitian entrants, certain Amerasian immigrants and their family members, survivors of torture, victims of trafficking, and unaccompanied alien children. This article will focus on ORR's

involvement with these other populations.

Other populations of concern to ORR

Asylees, like refugees, are defined as people who have a "well-founded fear of persecution" in their country of origin. However, the difference between a refugee and an asylee is in where the processing takes place. Refugees are processed in countries of first asylum while asylees are processed in the US. Asylum seekers come to the US by their own means, and once here, they apply for asylum in order to remain in the US for protection reasons. Since asylees have many of the same needs as refugees, ORR is well placed to assist these people once they have been granted asylum by the asylum corps and immigration courts. ORR maintains a hotline number (1-800-354-0365) which provides information to asylees about ORR programs.

Among other populations of concern to ORR are Cuban and Haitian entrants. Internal conflicts in their countries have compelled thousands of Cubans and Haitians to flee in search of a safer life in the US. Nationals from both of these countries continue to arrive on US shores. The Refugee Education Assistance Act of 1980 added them as a group eligible for ORR benefits and services.

Certain Amerasian immigrants and their accompanying family members are also eligible to receive ORR benefits and services. Amerasians of concern to ORR are children born in Vietnam to Vietnamese mothers and American fathers. More than 10,000 Amerasians and their families have been admitted to the US as immigrants and were resettled with ORR's assistance.

Survivors of torture are another group with acute needs living in the US. It has been estimated that there may be more than 400,000 torture survivors in the US. At the hands of their own governments, these people have endured systematic beating, sexual torture, electrical torture, suffocation, burning, bodily suspension, pharmacological torture, mutilations, deprivation and exhaustion, threats of torture, witnessing the torture of others, humiliation, and isolation. As a result, these people often have extensive physical and mental health needs when they reach the safety of the US. Recognizing the need for intervention, Congress passed the Torture Victims Relief Act of 1998 authorizing ORR to provide treatment services to all victims of torture regardless of their immigration status.

Victims of trafficking are another group of people who have been abused. Internationally, hundreds of thousands of women, children, and men are trafficked each year for

sexual exploitation, involuntary servitude, peonage, debt bondage or slavery. Precise numbers of victims are very difficult to pin down because trafficking is a clandestine operation, but it is estimated that each year thousands of victims are trafficked into the US. To deter this burgeoning atrocity, Congress enacted the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act in October 2000. The law aims to combat trafficking by increasing law enforcement, ensuring effective punishment of traffickers, and protecting victims. The law also authorizes ORR to be the lead agency in providing federal and certain State assistance to victims.

As of February 2004, ORR has assisted 478 certified victims and has launched an aggressive public awareness campaign to inform the general public about trafficking issues. A referral hotline will soon be in place so that trafficking victims and those who know of trafficking victims can receive information about the services available to these people.

Finally, unaccompanied alien children are the most recent group to come under the responsibility of ORR. Each year, 5,000 to 6,000 children who enter this country illegally are placed in federal custody. The Homeland Security Act of 2002 transferred care and placement functions for unaccompanied alien children from the Commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) to the Director of ORR on March 1, 2003. ORR currently provides care to 500-600 children, including shelter care, group home care, foster care, and residential treatment for children with special mental health needs, as

well as secure facilities for children with criminal histories and/or serious behavioral problems.

Services Available

ORR's main goal is to help refugees and members of these special groups obtain economic self-sufficiency and social integration as quickly as possible after their arrival in the US. Since ORR does not generally provide direct services, it funds States, voluntary agencies, faith-based organizations and community-based organizations that provide a range of benefits and direct services to eligible populations throughout the country.

Through State-administered programs, ORR provides cash and medical assistance for up to eight months from the client's date of arrival (or grant of asylum or certification as a victim of trafficking). Clients are eligible to continue benefiting from other State-administered social services such as employment preparation and job placement, skills training, English language training, and social adjustment assistance for up to five years after their arrival. States also provide specialized foster care for refugee children who do not have parents to care for them through the Unaccompanied Refugee Minors (URM) program. For these children, ORR pays the costs of foster care and maintenance until the child leaves the program.

In addition, the director of ORR has the authority to use discretionary funds to address special needs and to develop new programs to facilitate client self-sufficiency. Some of ORR's discretionary grant programs include assistance for achieving and maintaining healthy

marriages; employment subsidies for hard-to-place refugees; torture treatment; ongoing support services for trafficking victims; assistance for elderly refugees; economic development programs that allow clients to build their assets through investing in individual development accounts and micro-enterprise training and loans; and ethnic community self-help. ORR also collaborates with a number of public and private partners to develop initiatives to address emerging needs such as health promotion, rural resettlement opportunities and assistance to mutual aid associations.

In Conclusion

As the US continues to welcome people with a well-founded fear of persecution, ORR has the important responsibility of assisting these people to integrate into American society. Seeking to develop flexible and creative programs for extremely diverse populations, ORR is in continuous dialogue with its partners to identify new needs, lessons learned, and best practices. These conversations are facilitated through national consultations, workshops, conference calls, site visits, progress reporting and regular contact between ORR program staff and their grantees. As a result, ORR and its partners are well equipped to handle the complex needs of these people in a culturally sensitive way. Building on a strong foundation of almost a quarter of a century of experience, ORR is leading the way in responding to the needs of those who come to the US in search of a better life by helping them to take definitive steps toward reclaiming their lives. —**Nguyen Van Hanh**

FY 2003/2004 ADMISSIONS STATISTICS

Region	FY 2003 Regional Ceiling	FY 2004 Regional Ceiling	Total Arrivals in FY 2003 (as of 4/30/03)	Total Arrivals in FY 2004 (as of 4/30/04)
Africa	20,000	25,000	2,303	12,704
East Asia	4,000	6,500	1,200	689
Europe & Central Asia	16,500	13,000	5,789	6,007
Latin America & Caribbean	2,500	3,500	99	1,050
Near East & South Asia	7,000	2,000	1,911	1,540
TOTAL	50,000	*50,000	11,302	21,990

***President Bush has authorized the admission of up to 70,000 refugees if additional deserving cases can be identified and screened for admission by September 30.**

Meskhetian Turks to be resettled

In 1944, Stalin forcibly relocated tens of thousands of Meskhetian Turks, who are Muslims of Turkic ethnicity, from their ancestral homes in Georgia to Central Asia. When ethnic violence erupted in the Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan in 1989, they fled to various other parts of the Soviet Union. Of those who sought refuge in Russia, approximately 15,000 migrated to Krasnodar where the majority has been unable to attain citizenship or permanent residence. As a result, unlike Meskhetian Turks in other parts of Russia, many of those in Krasnodar have been denied basic civil, social, and property rights. In an effort to assist this population, the U.S. announced on February 16 that Krasnodar's Meskhetian Turks are

eligible for consideration under our Refugee Admissions Program. PRM is hopeful that resettlement will prove a durable solution for those Meskhetian Turks who choose to apply and are found eligible for refugee admission. PRM hopes that, by offering resettlement to those who apply and are found eligible, other solutions may become possible for those who remain, including full residency rights in Russia and/or the right to return to Georgia. Some Meskhetian Turks have already been interviewed by DHS and are enjoying a high rate of approval. They will begin arriving in the U.S. in early summer. Registration for the program remains open until August and arrivals in the U.S. are expected to continue through FY 2005.